

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A. OVERVIEW

The *Grant Proposal Guide* (GPG) provides guidance for the preparation and submission of proposals to NSF. Some NSF programs have program solicitations that modify the general provisions of this Guide, and, in such cases, the guidelines provided in the solicitation must be followed. Contact with NSF program personnel prior to proposal preparation is encouraged.

The Foundation considers proposals submitted by organizations on behalf of individuals or groups for support in most fields of research. Interdisciplinary proposals also are eligible for consideration.

NSF does not normally support technical assistance, pilot plant efforts, research requiring security classification, the development of products for commercial marketing or market research for a particular project or invention. Research with disease-related goals, including work on the etiology, diagnosis or treatment of physical or mental disease, abnormality, or malfunction in human beings or animals, is normally not supported. Animal models of such conditions or the development or testing of drugs or other procedures for their treatment also are not eligible for support. Research in bioengineering, with diagnosis or treatment-related goals, however, that applies engineering principles to problems in biology and medicine while advancing engineering knowledge is eligible for support. Bioengineering research to aid persons with disabilities also is eligible.

The NSF website (<http://www.nsf.gov/>) provides the most comprehensive source of information on NSF Directorates (including contact information), programs and funding opportunities. Use of this website by potential proposers is strongly encouraged. In addition, the NSF Custom News Service is an information-delivery system designed to keep potential proposers and other interested parties apprised of the issuance of new program announcements and solicitations (as well as other NSF publications and policies) through Internet e-mail or the user's Web browser. Subscribers are informed each time new publications are issued that match their identified interests. The Custom News Service is available on NSF's website at <http://www.nsf.gov>.

Research proposals to the Biological Sciences Directorate (not proposals for conferences or workshops) cannot be duplicates of proposals to any other Federal agency for simultaneous consideration. The only exceptions to this rule are: (1) when the proposers and program managers at relevant Federal agencies have previously agreed to joint review and possible joint funding of the proposal; or (2) proposals for PIs who are beginning investigators (individuals who have not been a principal investigator (PI)¹ or co-principal investigator (co-PI) on a Federally funded award with the exception of doctoral dissertation, postdoctoral fellowship or research planning grants). For proposers who qualify under this latter exception, the box for "Beginning Investigator" must be checked on the proposal Cover Sheet.

B. THE PROPOSAL

The proposal should present the (1) objectives and scientific or educational significance of the proposed work; (2) suitability of the methods to be employed; (3) qualifications of the investigator and the grantee organization;² (4) effect of the activity on the infrastructure of science, engineering and education; and (5) amount of funding required. It should present the merits of the proposed project clearly and should be prepared with the care and thoroughness of a paper submitted for publication. Sufficient information should be provided so that reviewers will be able to evaluate the proposal in accordance with the two merit review criteria established by the National Science Board. (See Chapter III.)

¹ As used in this Guide, the term "Principal Investigator" also includes the term "Project Director."

² Unless otherwise specified, the term "organization" refers to all categories of proposers.

NSF expects strict adherence to the rules of proper scholarship and attribution. The responsibility for proper attribution and citation rests with authors of a proposal; all parts of the proposal should be prepared with equal care for this concern. Serious failure to adhere to such standards can result in findings of misconduct in science. NSF policies and rules on misconduct in science and engineering are discussed in *Grant Policy Manual* (GPM) Section 930.

PROPRIETARY OR PRIVILEGED INFORMATION

Patentable ideas, trade secrets, privileged or confidential commercial or financial information, disclosure of which may harm the proposer, should be included in proposals only when such information is necessary to convey an understanding of the proposed project. Such information must be clearly marked in the proposal and be appropriately labeled with a legend such as,

“The following is (proprietary or confidential) information that (name of proposing organization) requests not be released to persons outside the Government, except for purposes of review and evaluation.”

Such information also may be included as a separate statement accompanying page 1 of the proposal Cover Sheet and submitted within 5 working days following the electronic submission of the proposal to the following address:

National Science Foundation
DIS-FastLane
4201 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22230

The box for “Proprietary and Privileged Information” must be checked on the Cover Sheet when the proposal contains such information. While NSF will make every effort to prevent unauthorized access to such material, the Foundation is not responsible or in any way liable for the release of such material. (See also Chapter VI, Section J, “Release of Grantee Proposal Information.”)

C. WHO MAY SUBMIT PROPOSALS

Scientists, engineers and educators usually initiate proposals that are officially submitted by their employing organization. Before formal submission, the proposal may be discussed with appropriate NSF program staff. Graduate students are not encouraged to submit research proposals, but should arrange to serve as research assistants to faculty members. Some NSF divisions accept proposals for Doctoral Dissertation Research Grants when submitted by a faculty member on behalf of the graduate student. The Foundation also provides support specifically for women and minority scientists and engineers, scientists and engineers with disabilities, and faculty at primarily undergraduate academic institutions.

CATEGORIES OF PROPOSERS

Except where a program solicitation establishes more restrictive eligibility criteria, individuals and organizations in the following categories may submit proposals:

1. **Universities and colleges**— US universities and two- and four-year colleges (including community colleges) acting on behalf of their faculty members.
2. **Non-profit, non-academic organizations** — Independent museums, observatories, research laboratories, professional societies and similar organizations in the US that are directly associated with educational or research activities.
3. **For-profit organizations** —US commercial organizations, especially small businesses with strong capabilities in scientific or engineering research or education. An unsolicited proposal from a commercial organization may be funded when the project is of special concern from a national point of view, special resources are available for the work, or the proposed project is especially meritorious. NSF is interested in supporting projects that couple industrial research resources and perspectives with those of universities; therefore, it especially welcomes proposals for cooperative projects involving both universities and the private commercial sector.

4. **State and Local Governments** — State educational offices or organizations and local school districts may submit proposals intended to broaden the impact, accelerate the pace and increase the effectiveness of improvements in science, mathematics and engineering education in both K-12 and post-secondary levels.
5. **Unaffiliated Individuals** — Scientists, engineers or educators in the US and US citizens may be eligible for support, provided that the individual is not employed by, or affiliated with, an organization, and:
 - ❖ the proposed project is sufficiently meritorious and otherwise complies with the conditions of any applicable proposal generating document;
 - ❖ the proposer has demonstrated the capability and has access to any necessary facilities to carry out the project; and
 - ❖ the proposer agrees to fiscal arrangements, that, in the opinion of the NSF Division of Grants & Agreements, ensure responsible management of Federal funds.

Unaffiliated individuals should contact the appropriate program before preparing a proposal for submission.
6. **Foreign organizations** — NSF rarely provides support to foreign organizations. NSF will consider proposals for cooperative projects involving US and foreign organizations, provided support is requested only for the US portion of the collaborative effort.
7. **Other Federal agencies** — NSF does not normally support research or education activities by scientists, engineers or educators employed by Federal agencies or Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs). A scientist, engineer or educator, however, who has a joint appointment with a university and a Federal agency (such as a Veterans Administration Hospital, or with a university and a FFRDC) may submit proposals through the university and may receive support if he/she is a bona fide faculty member of the university, although part of his/her salary may be provided by the Federal agency. Under unusual circumstances, other Federal agencies and FFRDCs may submit proposals directly to NSF. Preliminary inquiry should be made to the appropriate program before preparing a proposal for submission.

D. WHEN TO SUBMIT PROPOSALS

Many NSF programs accept proposals at any time. Other programs, however, establish target dates³, deadlines⁴ or submission windows⁵ for submission of proposals to allow time for their consideration by review panels that meet periodically. These target dates, deadlines, and submission windows are published in specific program announcements and solicitations that can be obtained from the NSF Clearinghouse at pubs@nsf.gov or electronically through the NSF website at <http://www.nsf.gov>.⁶ Unless otherwise stated in a program announcement or solicitation, proposals must be received by the specified date (and time, where indicated.) If the deadline date falls on a weekend, it will be extended to the following Monday; if the date falls on a holiday, it will be extended to the following business day. The deadline date only will be waived in extenuating circumstances. Inquiry about submission also may be made to the appropriate program.

Proposers should allow up to six months for programmatic review and processing (see Chapter III for additional information on the NSF merit review process). In addition, proposers should be aware that the NSF Division of Grants and Agreements generally makes awards to academic institutions within 30 days after the program division makes its recommendation. Grants being made to organizations that have not received an NSF award within the preceding two years, or involving special situations (such as coordination with another Federal agency or a private funding source), cooperative agreements, and other unusual arrangements may require additional review and processing time. Proposals that are time sensitive (e.g., conference, group travel, and research involving ephemeral phenomena) only will be accepted for review if, in the opinion of the cognizant Program Officer, they are received in sufficient time to permit appropriate NSF review and processing to support an award in advance of the activity to be supported. Every effort is made to reach a decision and inform the proposer promptly. Until an award is made, NSF is not responsible for any costs incurred by the proposing organization.

³ Target dates are dates after which proposals will still be reviewed, although they may miss a particular panel or committee meeting.

⁴ Deadlines are dates after which proposals usually will not be accepted for review by NSF.

⁵ Submission windows are designated periods of time during which proposals will be accepted for review by NSF.

⁶ A listing of upcoming target dates and deadlines, sorted by date and by program area is available electronically on the NSF website at <http://www.nsf.gov/home/deadline/deadline.htm>.

E. HOW TO SUBMIT PROPOSALS

1. Electronic Requirements

In order to provide better service to its customer communities, and to achieve significantly greater efficiencies in proposal handling and internal record-keeping, the National Science Foundation is rapidly moving toward all-electronic business practices. To accomplish this goal, in September 1998, the NSF Director issued Important Notice 123, *Working Towards a Paperless Proposal and Award System* (<http://www.nsf.gov/cgi-bin/getpub?iin123>). Important Notice 123 describes NSF's vision for the future in electronic business and outlines the schedule for implementation. As stipulated in this Notice, effective October 1, 2000, **ALL** proposals to NSF must be submitted electronically via the NSF FastLane system.⁷ For proposers who cannot submit electronically, a deviation must be approved in advance of submission of the paper proposal in accordance with GPG Chapter II, Section A.

Upon receipt of the proposal by NSF, proposals are generally converted to hard copy for distribution to the reviewer community. The rationale for this step is that the wide variance of equipment available to reviewers may not, at this time, assure that an all-electronic review process would be successful or totally fair to proposers. In the near future, NSF envisions that it will be possible to avoid this printing step and send proposals out for review solely by electronic means.

Special Instructions for Proposals That Contain High Resolution Graphics or Other Graphics Where Exact Color Representations are Required for Proper Interpretation by the Reviewer

For cost and technical reasons, the Foundation cannot, at this time, reproduce proposals containing color. Therefore, PIs generally should not rely on colorized objects to make their arguments. PIs who must include in their project descriptions very high resolution graphics or other graphics where exact color representations are required for proper interpretation by the reviewer, must submit the required number of copies of the **entire** paper proposal, including a paper copy of page 1 of the proposal Cover Sheet, for use in the review process. This submission is in addition to, not in lieu of, the electronic submission of the proposal via FastLane.

Upon submission of the proposal, the proposing organization will be notified of the required number of paper copies of the proposal that must be submitted to NSF. The exact number of copies required will appear in an electronic message at the time of FastLane submission and will depend on the NSF Division selected.⁸ Such proposals must be postmarked (or provide a legible proof of mailing date assigned by the carrier) within five working days following the electronic submission of the proposal.

Unless the proposal contains very high resolution graphics or other graphics where exact color representations are critical to the review of the proposal, proposers **should not** send in paper copies.

2. Submission Instructions

A proposal needs to be submitted only once to NSF, even if the proposer envisions review by multiple programs. The submission of duplicate or substantially similar proposals concurrently for review by more than one program without prior NSF approval may result in the return of the redundant proposals. (See Chapter IV, Section B for further information on proposal return.)

⁷ The NSF FastLane system uses Internet/Web technology to facilitate the way NSF does business with the research, education, and related communities. The NSF FastLane system should be used for proposal preparation; submission and status checking; project reporting; and post-award administrative activities. All FastLane functions are accessed by using a Web browser on the Internet. Detailed information about the FastLane system is available from the FastLane website at <http://www.fastlane.nsf.gov>.

⁸ Detailed instructions for submission of proposals that include very high resolution graphics or exact color representations that are required for proper interpretation by reviewers are available on the FastLane website at <http://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/a1/newstan.htm#color>.

In submission of a proposal for funding, the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR)⁹ is required to provide certain proposal certifications. (See Chapter II, Section C. for listing.) This process can concurrently occur with submission of the proposal for those organizations where the individual authorized to submit a proposal to NSF also is a designated AOR, or as a separate function for those organizations that choose to keep the certification process separate from the submission function. For those organizations that designate separate authorities in FastLane for these functions, the AOR must provide the required certifications within 5 working days following the electronic submission of the proposal.

Further instructions for this process are available on the FastLane website at <http://www.fastlane.nsf.gov>.

A proposal may not be processed until NSF has received the complete proposal (including the electronic certifications from the AOR.)

3. Acknowledgement of Proposal Receipt

The acknowledgement of the receipt of the proposal will reference both the NSF proposal number and the cognizant NSF program to which the proposal has been assigned. Once the proposal is submitted, PIs can access the proposal number via the "View Submitted Proposal" list in the FastLane Proposal Preparation module. If a proposal acknowledgement is not received or proposal number is not reflected in the FastLane System, contact the FastLane Help Desk at (800) 673-6188, or (703) 292-8142 or by e-mail to fastlane@nsf.gov.

When the proposal is assigned to an NSF program, the cognizant program information is available through the FastLane "Proposal Status Inquiry" function for PIs and through the "Recent Proposals" report for sponsored projects offices. Communications about the proposal should be addressed to the cognizant Program Officer with reference to the proposal number. Proposers are strongly encouraged to use FastLane to verify the status of their submission to NSF.

⁹ AOR is the individual(s) authorized to sign on behalf of the organization.